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The Bookshelf

Red Master Spy And Defender

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By JOHN BARNHAM

STRANGERS ON A BRIDGE.
THE CASE OF COLONEL ABEL. By James B. Donovan. Atheneum Publishers. 432 pp. \$6.95.

The bridge: the Glienicker Bridge in Berlin, linking West with East Germany.

The time: early morning of Feb. 10, 1962.

Counsel The strangers:
For the Soviet master
Unpopular spy Rudolf Abel,
arrested in the
United States;

U-2 pilot Gary Powers, arrested in the Soviet Union; and New York attorney James B. Donovan, who guided and supervised their exchange.

For James Donovan, a public-spirited New York attorney, it represented the last agonizing link in a chain of events which added years to his life—and luster to his reputation. He has written this absorbing account of his part in the Rudolf Abel affair, and it turns out to be a very good book indeed.

Donovan is, in fact, a rather unusual lawyer. He will undertake unpopular cases when many of his colleagues won't, because he genuinely believes that every accused person under our system of law has the right to the best defense he can afford. You may recall that he performed a similarly delicate, and equally unpopular, service in arranging with Castro to release the prisoners captured in the Bay of Pigs debacle.

Abel Operated 9 Years

What manner of man, then, is this New York Irishman with the Harvard law degree? He doesn't tell you in so many words, but it comes through clearly enough in his narrative of the Abel affair. Rudolf Abel

was for nine years head of the Soviet espionage apparatus in the United States. He operated out of an artist's studio in Brooklyn—a master spy in the true sense of the word, who might never have been caught had he not been betrayed by a subordinate. The U.S. knew it had caught a big fish, and decided to give Abel the sort of trial that would demonstrate the fairness of the American judicial process.

James Donovan was the counsel nominated to undertake Abel's defense, and he performed his assignment with exemplary skill. What emerges unmistakably from the book is the mutual respect that the two men felt for each other. Each was a strong character, utterly devoted to his country, and each was able to recognize similar qualities in the other.

Mutual Respect

Abel never betrayed his country, nor did Donovan ever promise more than he could perform. It was he who urged the court not to impose the death sentence, as it might well have done, if only because Abel could some day be exchanged for an American agent who might fall into Russian hands.

This is precisely what later happened, and when the exchange for Gary Powers (plus two other young Americans) became possible, it was Donovan who functioned as go-between. The Abel trial is exciting reading in its own right, and the intricate political maneuvering which preceded the meeting on the bridge might have come straight out of an Eric Ambler thriller.

Abel was grateful to his lawyer, and subsequently demonstrated his thanks in a graceful gesture recorded in these pages. At least one man in the Soviet Union today means, thanks in great part to James B. Donovan.